

Aruba's DANDE celebration...

The tradition of Dande is an end-of-the-year celebration unique to Aruba. The word dande (or dandee) is derived from the original Papiamentu word "dandara", which means "parandea: (or to revel; carouse; to have a good time). The celebration of dande began around 1880, after King William III declared the slaves "free men".

Dande is usually performed by a group of 5-6 people (sometimes more) who accompany the singer, door to door (mostly visiting family and friends), to sing and express their best wishes for the New Year. The musicians play the cuatro, a 4-stringed instrument similar to the ukelele; a tambor, a drum made from small wooden barrel with goat or sheep skin ends; the wiri, a metal rasp; the raspa, a rasp made from calabash fruit; a guitar, violin, marimba and accordion.

The songs are repetitive, and the chorus sings "ai nobe" – "new year" – after each phrase. While the musical style and the chorus remains the same, lyrics are improvised for each family which often leads to great hilarity. The chorus, "O Dande, Aii-i-nobo", ("A happy new year to you all") is, according to oral history, altered from the Spanish expression "Hay un aïio nuevo" ("a new year is here") since "an-i-nobo" does not exist in Papiamentu, the language of Aruba. A typical refrain is "O Dande, benediction pa tur familia" ("blessings to all your family") AR-i-bbo". Some districts now have their own Dande groups that perform on the second day of the year. Dande officially ends on January 6th.

Today, most districts have their own Dande group, who performs until the second day of the New Year. While visiting different houses, the singer collects money in his hat while performing. The money is donated as a token of appreciation for the entire ensemble. Some people today still believe that if the Dande group does not visit them on New Year's Day that they will have bad luck during the New Year.